

TOLERANCE in ISLAM

التسامح في الإسلام

Dr. Abdullah Al Luhaidan



الدار العالمية للكتاب الإسلامي



IN THE NAME OF

ALLAH

THE ALL-COMPASSIONATE, ALL-MERCIFUL



TOLERANCE IN ISLAM

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Pronunciation and Transliteration Chart

| Arabic script | Pronunciation | Transliterated form |
|---------------|--|--|
| أ | short 'a', as in <i>cat</i> | a |
| آ — ئ | longer 'a', as in <i>cab</i> (not as in <i>cake</i>) | â |
| ب | /b/ as in <i>bell</i> , <i>rubber</i> and <i>tab</i> | b |
| ت | /t/ as in <i>tap</i> , <i>mustard</i> and <i>sit</i> | t |
| ة | takes the sound of the preceding diacritical mark sometimes ending in h (when in pausal form): ah, ih or ooh; or atu(n), ati(n) or ata(n) when uninterrupted | h or t (when followed by another Arabic word) |
| ث | /th/ as in <i>thing</i> , <i>maths</i> and <i>wealth</i> | th |
| ج | /j/ as in <i>jam</i> , <i>ajar</i> and <i>age</i> | j |
| ح | a 'harsher' sound than the English initial /h/, and may occur medially and in word-final position as well | ḥ |
| خ | as in <i>Bach</i> (in German); may occur initially and medially as well | kh |
| د | /d/ as in <i>do</i> , <i>muddy</i> and <i>red</i> | d |
| ذ | as in <i>this</i> , <i>father</i> and <i>smooth</i> | dh |

| Arabic script | Pronunciation | Transliterated form |
|---------------|--|---------------------|
| ر | /r/ as in <i>raw</i> , <i>arid</i> and <i>war</i> ; may also be a rolled 'r', as pronounced in Spanish | r |
| ز | /z/ as in <i>zoo</i> , <i>easy</i> and <i>gaze</i> | z |
| س | /s/ as in <i>so</i> , <i>messy</i> and <i>grass</i> | s |
| ش | as in <i>ship</i> , <i>ashes</i> and <i>rush</i> | sh |
| ص | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /sw/ or /s/ farther back in the mouth | ṣ |
| ض | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /d/ farther back in the mouth | ḍ |
| ط | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /t/ farther back in the mouth | ṭ |
| ظ | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing 'the' farther back in the mouth | <u>dh</u> |
| ع | no close equivalent in English: a guttural sound in the back of the throat | ʿ |
| غ | no close equivalent in English, but may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like the French /r/ in 'rouge' | gh |

| Arabic script | Pronunciation | Transliterated form |
|---------------|---|-------------------------------|
| ف | /f/ as in <i>fill</i> , <i>effort</i> and <i>muff</i> | f |
| ق | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /k/ farther back in the mouth | q |
| ك | /k/ as in <i>king</i> , <i>buckle</i> and <i>tack</i> | k |
| ل | /l/ as in <i>lap</i> , <i>halo</i> ; in the word <i>Allah</i> , it becomes velarized as in <i>ball</i> | l |
| م | /m/ as in <i>men</i> , <i>simple</i> and <i>ram</i> | m |
| ن | /n/ as in <i>net</i> , <i>ant</i> and <i>can</i> | n |
| هـ - ه - ح | /h/ as in <i>hat</i> ; unlike /h/ in English, in Arabic /h/ is pronounced in medial and word-final positions as well | h |
| و | as in <i>wet</i> and <i>away</i> | w |
| و | long 'u', as in <i>boot</i> and <i>too</i> | oo |
| ي | as in <i>yard</i> and <i>mayo</i> | y |
| ي | long 'e', as in <i>eat</i> , <i>beef</i> and <i>see</i> | ee |
| ء | glottal stop: may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like 't' in the Cockney English pronunciation of <i>butter</i> : <i>bu'er</i> , or the stop sound in <i>uh-oh</i> ! | (omitted in initial position) |

Diphthongs

| Arabic script | Pronunciation | Trans-literated form |
|---------------|---|----------------------|
| أَوْ، وَاوْ | long 'o', as in <i>owe</i> , <i>boat</i> and <i>go</i> | au, aw |
| أَيَّ، يَايْ | long 'a', as in <i>aid</i> , <i>rain</i> and <i>say</i> | ay, ai, ei |

Diacritical marks (tashkeel)

| Name of mark | Pronunciation | Trans-literated form |
|---------------|--|----------------------|
| َ fathah | very short 'a' or schwa (unstressed vowel) | a |
| ِ kasrah | shorter version of ee or schwa (unstressed vowel) | i |
| ُ dammah | shorter version of oo | u |
| ّ shaddah | a doubled consonant is stressed in the word, and the length of the sound is also doubled | double letter |
| ◌◌◌ sukoon | no vowel sound between consonants or at the end of a word | absence of vowel |

Arabic honorific symbols

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--|
| (ﷲ) | <i>Subhânahu wa Ta'âlâ</i> | The Exalted |
| (ﷺ) | <i>şalla Allâhu 'alayhi wa sallam</i> | Blessings and peace be upon him |
| (ﷺ) | <i>'alayhi as-salâm</i> | May peace be upon him |
| (ﷻ) | <i>raḍiya Allâhu 'anhu</i> | May Allah be pleased with him |
| (ﷻ) | <i>raḍiya Allâhu 'anhâ</i> | May Allah be pleased with her |
| (ﷺ) | <i>raḍiya Allâhu 'anhumâ</i> | May Allah be pleased with both of them |
| (ﷺ) | <i>raḍiya Allâhu 'anhum</i> | May Allah be pleased with all of them |
| (ﷻ) | <i>raḍiya Allâhu 'anhunna</i> | May Allah be pleased with all of them (females only) |

Hadith grade terms

Sound: *ṣaḥeeḥ*

Reliable: *ḥasan*

Weak: *ḍa'eef*

Odd: *ghareeb*

Authentic: includes sound, reliable, or any grade in between

Acceptable: *sakat 'anhu*; the grader of the hadith did not comment on it, meaning that he found nothing unacceptable in it

About the Word '*Lord*'

The word lord in English has several related meanings. The original meaning is 'master' or 'ruler', and in this sense it is often used to refer to human beings: 'the lord of the mansion' or 'Lord So-and-So' (in the United Kingdom, for example). The word *Lord* with a capital L is used in the lexicon of Islam to refer to the One and Only God — Allah. In Islam, there is no ambiguity about the meaning of this word. While it is true that one may occasionally use the word *lord* (whether capitalized or not) to refer to a human being, in Islamic discourse the reference of this term is always clear from the context. Whereas for Christians, Hindus and other polytheists, the word *Lord* with a capital L may refer to Allah, to Jesus or to some imagined deity, for Muslims, there can be no plurality of meaning. Allah alone is the Lord, and the Lord is Allah — not Jesus, not Rama, not any other being.

The Editor

When Jihad Refers to Fighting

Although jihad is often translated into English as ‘holy war’, it must be noted that war has never been described as ‘holy’ in any of Islam’s primary texts or even early Islamic literature. Linguistically speaking, jihad is an Islamic term that applies to a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from daily striving to meet the day’s challenges, to the striving against one’s desires and self, to the struggle to provide for one’s family. Its basic definition is ‘the act of striving or struggling in the way of Allah’. Therefore, jihad is not limited to war; it includes struggling with one’s soul, speech, body and wealth so that the message of Allah reaches all humans willing to receive it.

Islamic scholars have referred to different types of jihad, such as jihad against the self (to understand Islam, act upon it, call others to it and be patient with the difficulties of making this call), jihad against the Devil (repelling Satanic whispers, doubts and lusts), jihad against the tongue (controlling it, using it to enjoin what is good, forbid what is wrong, spread the correct teachings of Islam and answer false ideologies), jihad against aggression with the purpose of protecting Islam and the lives, honour and property of Muslims) and other types of jihad like jihad against the hypocrites, jihad against oppressors and jihad against mischief makers.

Jihad — in the context of fighting — has specific rules and conditions that need to be met before jihad is initiated. The first rule is that people are not to be fought because of what they believe, or to coerce them to accept Islam. The second rule is to ‘fight only those who fight you’ and never initiate unprovoked aggression (*Qur’an* 2: 190).

That means that Muslims are only allowed to fight back, rather than initiating fighting; but ‘fighting back’ includes fighting against actual aggression as well as proactively addressing real threats of aggression. In both cases, Muslims are instructed to be prepared and ready to defend their nation before they actually engage in military conflict. There are additional conditions, but the above-mentioned conditions are vital for putting jihad in its broader meaning in the proper context.

Another condition of the sort of jihad which involves fighting is that it should take place only under an Islamic authority that ‘raises the banner’ for such jihad. It is not following the Sunnah at all for any individual or self-appointed group of Muslims to wage war on behalf of a nation. Instead, Muslims should be united under the single authority of an imam or khaleefah (caliph), except in the case where an individual needs to defend his own family and property, or to help his neighbour to do so. This is proved by the example of the early Muslims as well as texts in the Qur’an and the Sunnah:

﴿وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِّنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوِ الْخَوْفِ أَذَاعُوا بِهِ وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَىٰ

أُولَى الْأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنَيطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ... ﴿٨٣﴾ (سورة النساء: ٨٣)

«When there comes to them [the hypocrites] a matter related to [public] safety or fear, they spread it about; if only they had referred it to the Messenger and to such of them as are in authority, those among them who are able to think through the matter would have understood it...» (Qur’an 4: 83)

«Ḥudhayfah ibn Yaman asked the Prophet (ﷺ): What if (the Muslims) have no single leader (they are divided into disputing groups)? The Prophet (ﷺ) answered: If they have no single leader or unified group, then leave all these disputing groups, even if you have to bite on a tree until your death.» [part of a longer hadith recorded by Bukhari]

There are other conditions for jihad. In general, the rules laid out for war in Islam should be upheld unless there is some legitimate need or strategy when fighting occurs that would necessitate going against

those rules. A Muslim should not kill himself or herself (*Qur'an* 4: 29) nor kill another Muslim, except by accident (*Qur'an* 4: 92). Women, children, the elderly and other non-combatants should not be harmed. Land should not be destroyed, nor trees cut down. Corpses should not be mutilated. Islam should not be imposed upon non-believers. Rather, if combatant non-Muslims choose on their own to embrace Islam, even if only as a deceitful trick, it should be accepted by the Muslim leadership, and fighting should stop. Peace should be sought before lives are lost. Treaties and agreements should be upheld. Prisoners should be well-treated. Above all, justice must be done.

﴿وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقْتُلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْدُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ
الْمُعْصِينَ﴾ (١٩٠) وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ أَنَّهُمْ فَلَاعْدُوْنَ
إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ﴾ (١٩٣)

(سورة البقرة: ١٩٠-١٩٣)

﴿Fight in the path [according to the rules set by Allah] of Allah only those who fight you, but do not commit aggression [transgress limits]. Allah does not love aggressors. ...And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is [freely embraced] for [the individual's faith in] Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no aggression except against transgressors.﴾

(*Qur'an* 2: 190, 193)

﴿لَا يَنْهَكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِينِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا
إِلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ﴾ (١٩٨) إِنَّمَا يَنْهَكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُم
مِنْ دِينِكُمْ وَظَلَمُوا عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجَكُمْ أَنْ تُتَوَلَّوهُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾ (٢١٦)

(سورة الممتحنة: ٨-٩)

﴿Allah does not forbid you from being good, kind, just, and fair to those who have not fought you because of religion nor driven you from your homeland. Allah loves those who are just. Allah forbids you from giving allegiance to those who have fought you because of religion and have driven you from your homeland, and those who supported your expulsion...﴾

(*Qur'an* 60: 8-9)

In addition, the Muslim nation is encouraged to maintain strong military capabilities to promote justice and to deter acts of war and aggression.

﴿وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَءَاخِرِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ ۚ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٦٠)

﴿And make ready for them [their potential aggression] all you can of power, including steeds of war, to deter the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides, whom you may not know but whom Allah knows.﴾ (Qur'an 8: 60)

The Editor

Is Copyright Applicable to Islamic Books?

Some Muslims claim that they have a ‘right’ to pirate Islamic books, and to share, distribute or make use of such unauthorized copies of Islamic books, because they believe that **“Islamic knowledge cannot be sold”** or **“There is no copyright on Islamic knowledge.”**

There are strong opinions from highly respected scholars that say the opposite: that Islamic Sharia respects and supports the concept of copyright. (See the references below.)

The translation of a written work is in itself a work of authorship, and merits its own copyright, whether the text from which a translation is prepared is a copyrighted work or in the public domain (not copyrighted). Copyright is not intended to deprive people of access to knowledge. On the contrary, the respect of copyright helps those involved in disseminating such beneficial knowledge to continue working to disseminate even more knowledge and beneficial information.

In a fatwa issued by the Fiqh Council of the Muslim World League in Makkah, it is stated:

That [an] author may spend most of his life writing a beneficial book, and publishing and selling it, then another person could take a copy of it and publish it by modern means of printing and photocopying, and he could sell it in competition with the author, or distribute it for free in order to become famous by means of distribution, and thus the author’s efforts would be wasted. The same may also be said of inventors.

This is something that could discourage people of knowledge and smart people from writing and inventing, when they see that their efforts are going to be stolen as soon as they appear, and people who put no effort into them as the original authors and inventors did will make a business out of selling them and competing with them. The situation changed with the development of new means and methods, which had a serious impact on the change from what things used to be to how they have become, which requires us to examine anew how people's efforts and rights may be protected.

The author and inventor should have rights with regard to that which they have written and invented, and this right is something that belongs to them according to sharee'ah. It is not permissible for anyone to take it away from them without their permission, provided that the book or research does not promote evil in any way, or contain bid'ah (innovation) or misguidance that is contrary to the laws of Islam, otherwise it should be destroyed and it is not permissible to publish it.

Similarly neither the publisher with whom the author makes a deal nor anyone else has the right to change any of the book's content or to change anything else without the author's consent...

With regard to the author or inventor who is commissioned or hired by a publisher to write a book or by a company to invent something for it for a specific purpose, what he produces becomes the right of the company that hired him, and he is bound by the conditions that they agreed upon.

Based on this fatwa, anyone who encourages the production of pirated versions — whether he/she is an investor, a printer, a distributor, a bookseller or a consumer — is sharing in this unlawful and unjust act.

Allah says:

﴿... وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ ۖ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ...﴾

(سورة المائدة: ٢)

﴿...And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression...﴾ (Qur'an 5: 2)

Copyrights serve to protect the work of all those involved in producing Islamic texts: authors, translators, Sharia revisers, researchers, editors, proofreaders, designers and typesetters. Allah knows best.

The Editor

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- Beekun, Rafik. "Islam Forbids the Violation of Copyrights and Laws Regarding Intellectual Property." *The Islamic Workplace*. <http://theislamicworkplace.com/2008/09/03/islam-forbids-the-violation-copyright-laws-and-laws-regarding-intellectual-property/>.
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Publisher's Note

All praise and thanks belong to Allah alone, the One, the Almighty and All-Merciful. Blessings and peace be upon Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), the last of His messengers and prophets, and upon his family, his Companions and all those who follow in his footsteps until the end of time.

With rapid advances in communications technology, the world has become a close-knit community where interaction among different religious groups has increased manifold. Although this has led to progress and development, it has also enabled easy dissemination of misinformation about Islam and its teachings. The widespread animosity is augmented by Muslim extremists who, in their ignorance, actually instigate more hostility against Islam.

In *Tolerance in Islam*, Dr. Abdullah Al Luhaidan shows that Islam propagates peace, tolerance, cooperation and dialogue – not only among Muslims but also with non-Muslims. Using Qur'anic verses and examples from the lives of the Prophet (ﷺ) and our righteous predecessors, he discusses the ills that tarnish the image of Islam, the false propaganda about jihad, and the destructive effects of extremism.

May Allah accept the efforts of all those who contributed to the production of this book, and may it be acceptable to Him, *âmeen*.

Muhammad Abdul Mohsin Al-Tuwaijri
Managing Director
International Islamic Publishing House
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Translator's Foreword

All praise is due to Allah (*Subhânahu wa Ta'âlâ* – Glorified and Exalted is He), Lord of the worlds. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon His Prophet and Messenger Muhammad (*ṣalla Allâhu 'alayhi wa sallam* — blessings and peace be upon him) and his family, Companions and followers.

In recent times, it has become customary amongst some Muslims to deny that jihad (struggle or striving in Allah's cause) exists in Islam. Whilst some have deemed it to be abrogated and no longer relevant to our modern times, others have argued that 'jihad' has multiple meanings and that it should be used as a means of defence ('defensive jihad') only in extreme circumstances. At the other end of the spectrum, there are some who are brutally murdering their own Muslim brethren under the banner of 'jihad'.

The following short book by Dr. Abdullah Al Luhaidan is not primarily about jihad. It deals with the concept of tolerance in Islam. Although *at-tasâmuḥ fil-Islâm* (tolerance in Islam) is a relatively recent coinage, I believe – as the author mentions – that Islam has more powerful and more sublime concepts. These include the concept of mercy, which goes far beyond tolerance, as well as all-encompassing justice. The Qur'an repeatedly reminds us to be just, even with our own enemies. In the attempt to obliterate jihad from the religion, it is often forgotten that jihad was legislated to end corruption, ensure justice and achieve peace in the land. It was obligated so that humankind could be freed from the tyranny of worshipping slaves and focus on the worship of the Lord of the slaves.

This short book is an important reminder for Muslims to return to the biography of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and to learn from his lofty example. The Prophet (ﷺ) lived for many years, faced intense persecution and oppression, and had numerous enemies. However, he managed, by the grace of Allah (ﷻ), to build a strong community and win the hearts of thousands of Companions. While doing so, he changed the landscape of history. His every action indicated deep foresight and wisdom, granted to him by Allah. We direly need this level of foresight and wisdom in contemporary times.

Sumayyah B. Ahmad
Translator

Introduction

Societies are governed by a combination of religious, socio-political and ideological ruling systems as well as systems of regulations. These systems do not function in isolation; rather, they are intertwined. Morality plays a vital role in the systems existing in every society, including Islamic society, which upholds the values of peace, justice, equality, consultation and tolerance.

Before delving into the subject of tolerance in Islam, it will be useful to briefly review the fundamental principles of international relations in Islam.

Fundamental principles of international relations in Islam

The default relationship of a Muslim state with other states is one of peace. In Islam, war is the exception. It can only be waged for reasons that are just, in order to defend the faith. It is fought against those who prevent the religion from spreading, but its aim is not to force anyone to become Muslim.

﴿وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلَامِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ...﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٦١)

«And if they incline to peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon Allah...» (Qur'an 8: 61)¹

﴿أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلِمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ﴾ (سورة الحج: ٣٩)

«Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. Indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory.» (Qur'an 22: 39)

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢٥٦)

«There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion...» (Qur'an 2: 256)

Similarly, war is waged to defend the state and to protect the faith. The norm in Islamic international relations is peace, and jihad has been prescribed only to end tyranny and aggression. Preventing the

¹ The translations of the meanings of the verses of the Qur'an in this book have been taken, with some changes, from Saheeh International, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings*. (Editor)

defence of the true message – by not allowing people to call others to Allah and Islam – is the worst form of tyranny. Likewise, attacking Muslims; taking away their rights, including the right to practice their religion; and confiscating their wealth are forms of tyranny.

International relations in Islam are governed by a number of principles.

1. Allah has given dignity to all human beings (regardless of religion)

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْوَرْدِ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا﴾ (سورة الإسراء: ٧٠)

﴿And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference.﴾ (Qur'an 17: 70)

«It has been narrated that the funeral procession of a Jew passed by and the Prophet (ﷺ) stood up. Some of his Companions said: It is the funeral of a Jew.

The Prophet (ﷺ) replied: Is it not a soul (or a human being)?»² (Bukhari)

2. All people are equal, irrespective of their race or colour

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا...﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ١٨٩)

² All hadiths in this text have been checked and verified by IIPH's researchers. It is rare, but it does happen that a hadith is not verifiable within the timeframe of researching and editing the book. In that case, a decision is made by the editorial board whether or not to include the hadith. It is IIPH's policy not to include weak hadiths or fabricated (fake) hadiths in our publications. If a weak hadith is included in any text, it is usually because the author of the book discusses it as a weak hadith. (Editor)

﴿It is He who created you from one soul and created from it its mate that he might dwell in security with her...﴾ (Qur'an 7: 189)

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا

(سورة النساء: ١)

كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً...﴾

﴿O humankind, fear your Lord, Who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women...﴾ (Qur'an 4: 1)

Human beings were divided into groups and tribes not so that they would fight and try to dominate one another, but so that they would get to know one another.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا...﴾ (١٣)

(سورة الحجرات: ١٣)

﴿O humankind, indeed We have created you from (a single pair of) a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may come to know one another...﴾ (Qur'an 49: 13)

Compare this with certain elements of Western civilization who adopted the theory of evolution and (its links to) the concept of racial superiority. This was subsequently used to justify colonialism, by which the fair-skinned individuals colonized the world with the aim of developing and speeding up the evolutionary process for the rest of the human race.

3. Islam calls for tolerance

﴿وَلَا تَسْتَوِ الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ۚ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ

(سورة فصلت: ٣٤)

عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ﴾ (٣٤)

﴿And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.﴾

(Qur'an 41: 34)

Tolerance means accepting peaceful coexistence. However, this does not preclude the right of Muslims to spread their religion and to distinguish truth from falsehood. Recognizing the right of other religions to exist does not mean that one should refrain from expressing the truth, for faith is ultimately an individual responsibility. This will be discussed in more detail later.

4. Islam calls for freedom of religion, as Allah has instructed:

(سورة البقرة: ٢٥٦) ﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ...﴾

«There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion...»

(Qur'an 2: 256)

The Prophet (ﷺ) once prevented one of his Companions from forcing his two sons to accept Islam. One time an old woman came to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (*radiya Allāhu 'anhu* – may Allah be pleased with him), and he invited her to Islam, but she refused. Fearing that he might have been harsh with his request, 'Umar cried out, "O Allah, I am not forcing her."³

Nevertheless, freedom of belief has certain stipulations. The most crucial one is that there must not be any pressure that prevents an individual from embracing Islam or that compels a person to leave Islam for another religion, as is the case when fanatic evangelicals exploit poverty in Africa and Asia.

On the other hand, Muslims cannot leave their religion after being aware of the truth. If apostasy is politically motivated, whereby individuals intend to revolt against an Islamic system that is the constitutional form of government in the state, then it is punishable by death. This is similar to the punishment for someone who revolts against other (non-Islamic) socio-political systems; it is considered treason against the state. If apostasy is personal and the apostate does not openly declare it or attempt to call others to revolt against the Islamic

³ Abu Atlah, *al-Islām wal- 'Alâqât ad-Dawliyah*, 45.

system, then the jurists have differed over whether such an individual should be killed or imprisoned.

5. Islam calls for international cooperation

As soon as the Prophet (ﷺ) arrived in Madinah, he signed a formal charter setting out the rights and duties of the various groups, including those who had migrated for the sake of Allah, the Muslims of Madinah, and the Jewish tribes.

He also cooperated with other Arab tribes who had not embraced Islam, in order to achieve common goals. The Prophet (ﷺ) said the following about a pact for justice (*Ḥilf al-Fuḍool*, or ‘Alliance of the Virtuous’) that was signed before Islam:

«In the house of ‘Abdullâh ibn Jud‘ân, I witnessed a pact that is better, to me, than the best of camels the Arabs possess. If I were called to it after Islam, I would accept it.» (A sound hadith recorded by al-Bayhaqi)

The Arab tribes had signed this pact to assist the oppressed and aid the troubled.

6. Islam calls for cultural exchange

To summarize this principle, let us use Ibn Khaldoon’s categorization of sciences or knowledge into two basic types.

- natural knowledge, which human beings acquire through their minds; through their senses, they learn the finer aspects of this knowledge until they are able to distinguish the truth from falsehood.
- transmitted knowledge, which is divine and in which there is no role for the intellect, except when applying legal theories to substantive law.

There is no doubt that it is permissible for Muslims to exchange ideas with other cultures and civilizations if these ideas are related to the first category, for Allah (ﷻ) has mentioned:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا...﴾ (١٣)

(سورة الحجرات: ١٣)

﴿O humankind, indeed We have created you from (a single pair of) a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may come to know one another...﴾ (Qur'an 49: 13)

7. Islam calls us to abide by treaties

﴿وَأَوْفُوا بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ إِذَا عَاهَدْتُمْ وَلَا تَنْقُضُوا الْأَيْمَانَ بَعْدَ تَوْكِيدِهَا وَقَدْ جَعَلْتُمُ اللَّهَ عَلَيْكُمْ كَفِيلًا...﴾ (٩١)

(سورة النحل: ٩١)

﴿And fulfil the covenant of Allah when you have taken it [O believers], and do not break oaths after their confirmation while you have made Allah, over you, a witness...﴾ (Qur'an 16: 91)

The Prophet (ﷺ) abided by the clauses of all the agreements he made. In accordance with the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, he temporarily refused to allow people who had accepted Islam to move from Makkah to Madinah.⁴ Subsequently, these individuals lived in the mountains and intercepted the caravans of the Quraysh (the dominant tribe in Makkah at the time; their society was based on polytheism).

⁴ When the Prophet (ﷺ) signed the treaty of Hudaibiyah (in 628 CE/6 AH) with the non-Muslim Quraysh tribe of Makkah, its conditions appeared to be unfavourable to the Muslims. For example, a new convert to Islam who escaped from Makkah to seek refuge in Madinah could be forced to return to his non-Muslim family if they requested, whereas the same tough condition was not applied to the non-Muslims. The Companions were unhappy with this and other conditions; their commitment to abide by the treaty was sorely tested when a Muslim (the son of the Makkan pagan sent to negotiate the treaty of Hudaibiyah with the Prophet (ﷺ)) arrived, declaring his conversion to Islam and asking for their help, but was forced back to Makkah by his father. The Prophet (ﷺ) insisted on abiding by the treaty, and in time, the treaty proved to be highly beneficial to the Muslims. (Editor)

8. Islam requires reciprocal treatment

﴿وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ﴾
(سورة البقرة: ١٩٠)

«Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed Allah does not like transgressors.» (Qur'an 2: 190)

﴿وَإِنْ عَاقَبْتُمْ فَعَاقِبُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبْتُمْ بِهِ وَلَئِنْ صَبَرْتُمْ لَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لِلصَّابِرِينَ﴾
(سورة النحل: ١٢٦)

«And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed. But if you are patient – it is better for those who are patient.» (Qur'an 16: 126)

The abolition of slavery should be examined within this framework. The victorious nations used to take fighters from the defeated armies and make them into slaves. However, as long as the world is united on abolishing slavery, Muslims must not lag behind in this path of human development, especially as this concurs with higher objectives of the Sharia (Islamic law). During the Bosnian War, the Serbs raped a number of Bosnian Muslim women, leading some Bosnian soldiers to believe they could treat Serb women as slaves of war. This stance was rejected because it would have equated the Muslims with the Serbs, who were condemned internationally. Nevertheless, if the international community changed its stance and reintroduced slavery, then the Muslims would have the right to do likewise.

Tolerance in Islam

The Qur'an and the Sunnah (the practice and collected sayings of Prophet Muhammad [ﷺ]) reiterate that Islam is a religion of tolerance.

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمَرْ
بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

(سورة البقرة: ٢٥٦)

«There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has been clearly distinguished from the wrong, so whoever disbelieves in idols and evil powers and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. Allah is Hearing and Knowing.» (Qur'an 2: 256)

The Prophet (ﷺ) accepted Jews as citizens of the first Muslim state in Madinah. He did not force them to forsake their religion and embrace Islam. The treaty that the Prophet (ﷺ) drew up upon his arrival in Madinah stated that Jews of the Banu 'Awf tribe constituted one nation with the believers. The Jews had their own religion, and the Muslims had theirs. This was not restricted to the Jews of Banu 'Awf but also included the rest of the Jewish tribes.

The meaning of tolerance

The Arabic word for ‘tolerance’, *tasâmuḥ*,⁵ encompasses many shades of meaning, including forgiveness, ease and smoothness.⁶ The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The most beloved religion in the sight of Allah is benevolent (*samḥah*) monotheism.» (Bukhari)

In Western political thought, the concept of tolerance emerged after the end of the religious wars in the 17th century. Its acceptance led to the end of sectarian strife and ensured peace in 19th century European societies.⁷ The concept of tolerance is related to pluralism, or accepting differences and allowing freedom of opinion.

⁵ Wherever possible, Arabic terms have been translated into English. In cases where we have chosen to retain the Arabic, the transliterated word or phrase is shown in italics the first time it appears in the text; the term is also defined in the glossary found at the end of this book. (Editor)

⁶ It is important to note the different connotations of the English ‘tolerance’ and the Arabic ‘*tasâmuḥ*’. Abdel-Haleem makes an important distinction: ... Thus the Muslims in Arabic talk about *tasâmuḥ al-Islâm* and *at-tasâmuḥ ad-deeni*, in a quite different way from the English usage. Where ‘tolerance’ indicates a powerful authority grudgingly ‘bearing’ or ‘putting up with’ others who are different, the Arabic term denotes generosity and ease from both sides on a reciprocal basis. The term is always used in the reciprocal form.

From Abdel-Haleem, “The Prophet Muhammad as a Teacher,” 121–137. ‘*Tasâmuḥ*’ is derived from ‘*samḥah*’. Ibn Ḥajar defines ‘*samḥah*’ as easy and based on ease. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bâri*, 94.

⁷ Turkistâni, *at-Tasâmuḥ wat-Ta’aşşub*, 10.

In Islamic thought, tolerance does not mean weakness. Flattery that conceals differences and only appears to be resolving them is not tolerance, nor is devising a false stance of agreement. The Qur'an has condemned those who hide the realities and truths of the religion.

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنزَلْنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالْهُدَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّاهُ لِلنَّاسِ فِي الْكِتَابِ ۖ أُولَٰئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّعْنُونَ﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٥٩)

«Indeed, those who conceal what We sent down of clear proofs and guidance after We made it clear for the people in the Scripture – those are cursed by Allah and cursed by those who curse.» (Qur'an 2: 159)

Within the Muslim framework, tolerance means recognizing differences, and it prevents these differences from developing into attempts at quashing the 'other'. It also leads to an acceptance of peaceful coexistence. Tolerance has its limits, though; it does not mean surrendering or being submissive in the face of aggression. On the contrary, Muslims have been permitted to repel aggression.

﴿أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلِمُوا ۖ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ﴾ (سورة الحج: ٣٩)

«Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. Indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory.» (Qur'an 22: 39)

﴿وَإِن عَاقَبْتُمْ فَعَاقِبُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبْتُمْ بِهِ ۖ وَلَئِن صَبَرْتُمْ لَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لِلصَّابِرِينَ﴾ (سورة النحل: ١٢٦)

«And if you punish [an enemy, O believers], punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed. But if you are patient – it is better for those who are patient.» (Qur'an 16: 126)

Today, extremism among some Muslims exists due to international, political, social and economic circumstances. On the ideological level, a misunderstanding of the concept of tolerance has led to extremism. Extremism and lack of tolerance towards the 'other' lead people to

become frightened of the religion of love and peace, and they cause endless conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim societies and even within Muslim societies themselves.

﴿...هُوَ أَجْتَبَكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ...﴾ (سورة الحج: ٧٨)

﴿...He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty...﴾ (Qur'an 22: 78)

﴿...يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٨٥)

﴿...Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship...﴾ (Qur'an 2: 185)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«May the extremists be destroyed, may the extremists be destroyed, may the extremists be destroyed...» (Muslim)

This religion came to relieve the burdens of the previous nations. The call to Islam was to be carried out with wisdom and good manners, while no one was to be forced to accept it. Islam came to call for coexistence despite differences.

﴿وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَآمَنَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾ (سورة يونس: ٩٩)

﴿Then [O Muhammad,] would you compel the people in order that they become believers?﴾ (Qur'an 10: 99)

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ...﴾ (سورة الحجرات: ١٣)

﴿O humankind, indeed We have created you from (a single pair of) a male and a female and made you nations and tribes that you may come to know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you...﴾ (Qur'an 49: 13)

The extremism that has engulfed certain Muslim countries also has other causes, one of which is an incorrect understanding of jihad; therefore, it is vital to understand the concept of jihad accurately.

Understanding jihad between the two extremes

Most of today's literature covering the concept of jihad in Islam has a defensive tone when faced with the incorrect Western understanding of jihad. Some Orientalists have translated the word jihad as 'holy war,' a term which in Western history and minds refers to the wars waged by certain Christian groups (Crusaders) in order to subjugate other groups and make them adhere to their beliefs. The phrase 'holy war' carries many negative connotations in the contemporary Western mind.

Some Muslim authors hold the view that translating the word 'jihad' as 'holy war' is damaging to Islam. They have consequently exerted great efforts to negate any purposes of jihad that are related to disseminating the teachings of Islam and calling people to accept and embrace Islam. In defining jihad, they have restricted it to a defensive war waged by the Muslims in order to defend their religion, lands or wealth. Such defensive wars are acceptable in contemporary Western thought, but this same mentality rejects any group who wages war in order to spread a message. When discussing jihad and other Islamic concepts, many Muslim authors take into account the Western experience of religion in the Middle Ages. This can lead to altering the meanings of some concepts, in order to make them more acceptable and understandable in the West.

Taking concepts from one civilization and applying them to another is a very delicate issue. For example, the concept of secularism that became widespread in the West, in the early stages of the Renaissance

and particularly in modern times, has specific meanings that relate to Christianity and the European history of the Middle Ages. Trying to apply this term to the Muslim world is problematic, because the Muslim faith and Islamic history differ radically from European concepts and history. Islam did not originally recognize the concept of the exclusively theocratic state;⁸ consequently, secularism appeared as its direct opposite.

Likewise, the concept of jihad has suffered similar problems in being translated and explained in the West. Concepts and terminology should only be transferred from one culture to another after an extensive study of the origin of words and their linguistic, technical and historical meanings and interpretations.

Some Muslims, in their eagerness to improve the image of Islam, have downplayed the definition of jihad and limited it to being a war which Muslims wage in defence of their religion, lands or wealth. Although these people were prompted to do this by their love of the religion and by their desire to disassociate Islam from the negative images conjured up in the West by the term 'holy war', they did not outline all the meanings of jihad as understood in Islam. This may also have been due to some indulgence and partiality to the West.

As a result, an opposing view emerged. Adherents to this view were fanatical in their understanding of jihad, to the extent that they equated it with 'holy war' as understood by the Christians: a war that is waged in order to force people into accepting a specific set of beliefs.

Similarly, the influx of secular thought in Islamic countries led to the creation of an opposing extremist ideology that held that the Islamic state should be excessively theocratic, with no place for reason and the public interest.

⁸ While the Islamic state is of course guided by religious principles, it has, in its authentic form, room for reason and consideration of the public interest, as discussed below. (Editor)

The secular trend called for rejecting Sharia-based texts, separating them from the political arena, or, in the very best situation, reinterpreting the texts in order to make them conform to modern life. In contrast, their opponents called for an extreme ideology that rejects the role of reason in legislation and uses texts haphazardly, interpreting them out of context to govern all aspects of life.

Finding a way out of this conflict requires a return to the original sources of the Sharia in order to express Islamic concepts in a language that is appropriate for our time. This requires greater effort from the scholars and thinkers of the Ummah (the entire global community of Muslims). The rigidity of scholars and thinkers has led to some people espousing secularism, whereas others adopt religious extremism, defending themselves from the onslaught of the secularists by using the texts [rigidly].

Jihad definitely does not mean ‘holy war’ as it occurred in Western history, as in Spain, when people were forced to embrace a specific religion or be killed. After the fall of Muslim Spain, Muslims had only two options: either embrace Catholicism or be killed. Thousands of Muslims were killed in Spain after the re-establishment of Christian rule, and thousands of others fled to Morocco. Those who fled included Jews, who feared for their lives. They chose to go to Morocco, where they enjoyed protection as ‘People of the Book’ (meaning Christians and Jews, so called because they have divinely-revealed scriptures). Muslims were basically wiped out in Spain, after having lived there for more than six centuries. In contrast, Christians, Jews and adherents of other faiths were not treated in this manner after the Muslim conquests of Greater Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Persia and North Africa, as shown by their continuing presence there. The purpose of jihad is not to force people to embrace Islam, and the Qur’an is very clear on this matter.

«There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong...» (Qur'an 2: 256)

What would be the purpose of forcing someone into a religion? Would this kind of religion actually touch the hearts? People who accepted the religion under the threat of a sword would abandon it as soon as the state collapsed.

Nevertheless, it is necessary for the Muslims to wage war in order to spread the Islamic message. There may appear to be a contradiction here, but examining the early Islamic history will remove it.

The Prophet (ﷺ) sent letters to the kings and emperors of his time, calling them to Islam. Some of them neither rejected the invitation nor accepted it openly, but they did allow their empires to become places of refuge for the believers. They gave Muslims the freedom to invite others to their religion, and they did not persecute anyone for being Muslim. They also did not plot to create strife in the Muslim state. An example of this was Negus of Abyssinia. Muslim armies never fought against him; every Abyssinian who accepted Islam did so through *da'wah* (disseminating the teachings of Islam and calling people to embrace Islam) and by virtue of example.

There were other kings who not only refused the invitation and killed the emissaries of the Messenger (ﷺ) but also attempted to cause discord in the Muslim state; therefore, it was necessary for the Muslims to fight them. An example is Chosroes of Persia, who thought that famine was the motive behind the Muslim armies surrounding his kingdom. As the Muslim armies attacked their Persian counterparts, Chosroes promised to give them as much money as they wanted. The Muslims responded that their motivation was not wealth; they had come to lead people from worshipping slaves to worshipping the Lord of the slaves.

Jihad in Islam has several purposes, one of which is defending Muslims when they are faced with aggression, as in Palestine, Chechnya and Kashmir. It is permissible to use all means against

the aggressor, including military and civilian facilities that exist in Muslim lands. It is not permissible to target civilian facilities outside the occupied Muslim lands, such as the synagogues in Europe or anywhere else, or the homes of Russian or Indian civilians outside of Chechnya and Kashmir.

Jihad is also used to disseminate the teachings of Islam when a country prevents da'wah. There are some dictatorial regimes that do not allow da'wah and that persecute anyone who accepts Islam. In this scenario, Muslims must fight in order to remove these regimes that oppose the spread of the message. Toppling these regimes does not mean forcing people to embrace Islam, though, because this only comes about through personal conviction. Muslims must remove any hindrances preventing people from practising their right to worship One God.

Acts of killing and violence directed towards civilians, whether in countries at peace with the Muslims or even in the lands of those who are in conflict with the Muslims, have nothing to do with jihad. The Prophet (ﷺ) refused permission to execute those individuals who were torturing the Muslims of Makkah; he commanded the Muslims to be patient until they had an army that could confront the army of the disbelievers in the battlefield. There is a consensus among the leading Muslim scholars and thinkers that acts of violence against civilians are damaging to Islam and the Muslims.

Muslims must fight to end injustice, even if those who are being oppressed are not Muslims, because Muslims must be the first ones to fight oppression, aggression and racism.

There is no doubt that the concept of jihad in Islam is much more comprehensive than mere war.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ شُهَدَآءَ لِلّٰهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ
 ٱلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ ؕ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَٱللَّهُ أَوَّلَىٰ بِهِمَا ؕ فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا ٱلْهَوَىٰ أَن
 تَعْدِلُوا ؕ وَإِن تَلَوْا أَوْ نَعِضُوا فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا ﴿١٣٥﴾﴾ (سورة النساء: ١٣٥)

﴿O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.﴾ (Qur'an 4: 135)

Greater jihad refers to fighting the soul that commands evil; one should submit to the truth and to what is good, while forsaking evil, injustice and immoral acts.

Is Islam a religion of violence and compulsion?

At this point, we are confronted with the accusations of the Orientalists, who argue that Islam is a bloody religion that was spread by the sword. To support their arguments, they cite battles that the Prophet (ﷺ) fought, such as the Battles of Badr, 'Uḥud, and the Trench; the conquest of Makkah; and the military expeditions of the four Rightly-Guided caliphs against the Byzantine empire in Greater Syria and Egypt and against the Sassanid empire in Persia and Iraq.

These opinions are inaccurate and are easily invalidated by citing historical facts. The Battle of Badr occurred when the Prophet (ﷺ) ordered the attack on the caravans of the Quraysh to reclaim some of the rights that had been forcefully seized from the Muslims by the polytheists in Makkah. The Muslims had suffered greatly in Makkah due to the hostility of the Quraysh, and this had forced them to migrate to Madinah, leaving their property and wealth behind. The Quraysh, out of their hatred and spite for the Muslims, had seized their homes and wealth in Makkah. The attack on the caravan, which led to the battle, was intended to retrieve what rightfully belonged to the Muslims.

The Quraysh waged the Battle of Uḥud in order to avenge those who had died at Badr.

The Battle of the Trench occurred when the polytheists, threatened by the economic and social stability of the Muslim state, allied with other tribes in order to wipe out the Muslims.

The conquest of Makkah took place after the polytheists violated the treaty of Ḥudaybiyah by attacking Khuzâ'ah, a tribe which was allied with the Muslims.

The military expeditions against the Byzantine and Sassanid empires came after those states had closed their doors to Islamic da'wah and had attacked the Muslims. Before launching these expeditions, the Prophet (ﷺ) sent letters to the kings and emperors of his time, calling them to Islam. The King of Persia responded by killing the Prophet's messenger; even according to modern international law, this action is regarded as an act of aggression and a declaration of war.

What was worse and more cunning was how the Sassanid empire, after the demise of the Prophet (ﷺ), assisted the apostates and encouraged them to disassociate themselves from the Muslim state. This interference in a state's internal affairs was equivalent to a declaration of war.

During the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ), the Byzantine empire had supported the hypocrites in Madinah when they built what is known as the Mosque of Dissension, intending to cause disunity amongst the Muslims.⁹ They refused to acknowledge the Muslims' duty to spread the message and waited for calamity to befall the Muslims.

⁹ The hypocrites in Madinah (supported by the Byzantines, led by Heraclius) built a meeting place where they could plot against the Muslims. They called it a mosque and invited the Prophet (ﷺ) to pray there, but he found out the truth through divine revelation:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مَسْجِدًا ضِرَارًا وَكُفْرًا وَتَفَرِّقًا بَيْنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَإِنْ كَادَ لِمَنْ حَارَبَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَيَحْلِفْنَ إِنْ أَرَدْنَا إِلَّا آلَ الْحُسْنَىٰ وَاللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ إِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ﴾ (١٧)

(سورة التوبة: ١٠٧)

﴿And [there are] those [hypocrites] who took for themselves a mosque for causing harm and disbelief and division among the believers and as a station for whoever had warred against Allah and His Messenger before. They will surely swear: We intended only the best. Allah testifies that indeed they are liars.﴾
(*Qur'an* 9: 107) (Editor)

The military expeditions (against the Persian and Byzantine empires) carried out under the leadership of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar were expeditions of life or death for the newly established Muslim state, whose enemies were waiting for the opportunity to finish off both the state and the message simultaneously. Yet Allah intended otherwise; the state remained, the message flourished, and people entered into the fold of Islam in droves, happy to be released from the tyranny of the Byzantine and the Sassanid empires.

This joy was not limited to those who embraced Islam; it extended to the People of the Book, to those who had covenants with the Muslims, and to other religious minorities who suffered a great deal living in these empires. Sir Thomas Arnold writes:

Michael the Elder, Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, writing in the latter half of the twelfth century, could approve the decision of his co-religionists and see the finger of God in Arab conquests even after the Eastern churches had had experience of five centuries of Muhammadan rule...

[After recounting the persecution of Heraclius, Michael the Elder observes:] This is why the God of vengeance, who alone is all-powerful, and changes the empire of mortals as He wills, giving it to whomsoever He wills, and uplifting the humble — beholding the wickedness of the Romans who, throughout their dominions, cruelly plundered our churches and our monasteries and condemned us without pity, brought from the region of the south the sons of Ishmael, to deliver us through them from the hands of the Romans...¹⁰

Orientalist Scholar Gibb notes in his book *Whither Islam?*:

But Islam has a still further service to render to the cause of humanity... *No other society has such a record of success uniting in an equality of status, of opportunity, and of endeavours so many and*

¹⁰ Arnold, *The Spread of Islam in the World*, 54.

*so various races of humankind... If ever the opposition of the great societies of East and West is to be replaced by cooperation, the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition.*¹¹

Muslim jurists divide the world into three categories:

***Dâr al-Islâm* (the land of Islam)**

This refers to the regions governed by the Muslims. Even if they are not united, the relations among them should be cordial and based on cooperation and compassion. These countries collectively form the Muslim Ummah, and the believers are brothers and sisters.

(سورة الحجرات: ١٠)

﴿إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ...﴾

﴿The believers are but brothers...﴾

(Qur'an 49: 10)

There should be mutual solidarity, so that the rich assist the poor, the strong assist the weak, and so on. Likewise, a Muslim country must not attack another Muslim country. If any such attack occurs, not only should it be condemned, but the aggressive party must also be repelled if attempts at reconciliation have been made and have been unsuccessful.

﴿وَلِإِنْ طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِنْ بَغَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى

(سورة الحجرات: ٩)

الْأُخْرَىٰ فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّىٰ تَفِيءَ إِلَىٰ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ...﴾

﴿And if two factions among the believers should fight, then make settlement between the two. But if one of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that oppresses until it returns to the ordinance of Allah...﴾

(Qur'an 49: 9)

***Dâr al-Harb* (the land of war)**

This second category includes countries that fight against Islam and the Muslims. If a country persecutes its Muslim minorities or

¹¹ Gibb, *Whither Islam?*, 379.

refuses to grant them their rights – especially the rights of worship and ownership, or their right to teach their children Islam – or seizes their property and money, then the country is considered *Dâr al-Harb*. The same applies if the Muslims' lands are expropriated and they are expelled, or if a non-Muslim country attacks a Muslim country, unjustly attacks a non-Muslim country, refuses to allow the message of Islam, or is a repressive country that steals the natural rights with which Allah has endowed humankind. Any of the above situations will result in the oppressive country becoming *Dâr al-Harb*. It is incumbent upon Muslims to boycott and fight this country on all levels unless the rulers believe that there is greater benefit for Islam and the Muslims in having a truce with this country.

***Dâr al-'Ahd* (the land of treaty)**

This refers to countries that have treaties and truces with the Muslim state; they respect the Muslim state and do not try to attack it or to interfere in its internal affairs. They respect Islam as a religion, do not harass Muslims living within their borders or prevent them from worshipping and calling to their religion, and do not harm those people who wish to convert to Islam. Both Muslims and non-Muslims living in these countries are granted their rights.

﴿...وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَهْدِ إِنَّ الْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْئُولًا﴾ (سورة الإسراء: ٣٤)

﴿...And fulfil [every] commitment. Indeed, the commitment is ever [that about which one will be] questioned.﴾ (Qur'an 17: 34)

Facets of Tolerance in Islam

Human beings are endowed with a high status simply by virtue of being human. Allah has made it clear in the noble Qur'an that He created Adam ('*alayhi as-salâm* – peace be upon him), the father of humankind, with His hand and blew in him from His soul. He ordered the angels to bow down before Adam, and He created for him a wife and put love and compassion between them. In Islamic creed, there is a direct relationship between human beings and God that protects their dignity and does not allow them to be exploited.

﴿وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ۚ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِلَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٨٦)

«And when My servants ask you [, O Muhammad,] concerning Me — indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.» (Qur'an 2: 186)

Due to the high status bestowed upon humankind, a person's soul and life are also of great importance.

﴿...مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا...﴾ (سورة المائدة: ٣٢)

«...whoever kills a soul, unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land – it is as if he had slain humankind entirely, and whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved humankind entirely...»

(Qur'an 5: 32)

Likewise, whoever intentionally kills an innocent person will be punished with hellfire for eternity. Throughout the Islamic conquests, it was not the case that nations were wiped out so that Muslims could replace them. On the contrary, nations used to embrace Islam willingly, and those who refused to accept Islam were allowed to live and practise their own religions. Today, other faiths still exist in regions that were conquered by the Muslims over fourteen centuries ago, such as Syria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt and North Africa. Muslims in India and Andalusia recognised the 'others' and did not compel anyone to embrace Islam, yet Spanish kings massacred Muslims when they conquered Spain. They converted their mosques into churches, and they burned their books to the extent that not a single book remained from the millions authored and owned by Andalusian scholars and scribes.

If not for the Islamic conquest of Andalusia, the Jews, who were being oppressed by the rulers of the Iberian Peninsula before the conquest, would have been annihilated. Under Islam, they received their rights, were respected, and enjoyed a degree of social and political status that cannot be denied. After the fall of Andalusia, they migrated with the Muslims to Morocco, where thousands still live today.

The non-Muslims were aware of how Muslims respected human life and how Islam honoured humankind, which is why they did not hesitate to request the aid of the Muslims and to seek their protection, even from their co-religionists. In 13 AH/ 623 CE, during the early period of Islam, the Christians of Syria wrote:

O Muslims, you are more beloved to us than the Romans, even though they share our religion. You are more loyal and kinder than them. You do not oppress us and are superior rulers.¹²

Thomas Arnold writes in his book *The Spread of Islam in the World*, "Arab Christians living in Muslim societies today are a living proof of this tolerance." Elsewhere, he mentions:

¹² al-Balâdhuri, *Fath al-Buldân*, 139.

The Christians enjoyed a level of prosperity, especially in the cities, in the early days of the caliphate. They enjoyed religious freedom, and their lives and property were secure.¹³

Islam honours human beings simply by virtue of their humanity, irrespective of colour, religion or race, and this leads to the rights of humans being highly valued. The most important are the rights of life, ownership and happiness. Since these rights are guaranteed in the Qur'an and Sunnah, they cannot be changed; according to the Sharia, any alteration therein would be void.

¹³ Arnold, *ad-Da'wah ilâ al-Islâm*, 81.

Lack of Compulsion in Religion

Islam ensures freedom of belief for every human being. This is not an affirmation of any misguided beliefs; it simply means that people should not be forced to change their religion or beliefs, as stated in the Qur'an (2: 256). Honkah, author of the book *The Sun of the Arabs rises over the West*, mentions:

The Arabs did not impose Islam on the nations they conquered. Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians who had, prior to Islam, experienced the worst forms of religious intolerance were now allowed to practise their faiths. The Muslims allowed them to keep their holy places and their religious figures and did not harass them whatsoever.

Elsewhere, the author poses the question:

Is this not the epitome of tolerance? Where has history witnessed events like these? Who would not breathe a sigh of relief at the new Muslim rulers' lack of interference in their internal affairs after the persecution by the Byzantines, the atrocities of the Spaniards and the repression of the Jews? The Patriarch of Jerusalem wrote to his counterpart in Constantinople in 9 CE about the Arabs: They are just people and do not oppress us in the slightest, nor do they use violence when dealing with us.¹⁴

A Companion of the Prophet (ﷺ), who was from the *Anṣâr* (the Muslim citizens of Madinah who gave refuge to the Prophet [ﷺ] and the other Muslim emigrants from Makkah), intended to force his two

¹⁴ Honkah, *Shams al-'Arab*, 364.

sons to convert to Islam, but the Prophet (ﷺ) prevented him from doing so. Once an elderly woman approached ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (رضي الله عنه) to ask him for something. Since she was not a Muslim, ‘Umar invited her to Islam, but she refused. ‘Umar feared that he may have been harsh with her, so he said, “O Allah, I am not forcing her.”¹⁵

It has not been proven that Muslims throughout history forced non-Muslims to accept Islam. Gustave Le Bon wrote, “The truth is that nations have not seen conquerors as merciful and tolerant as the Arabs, nor a religion as tolerant as theirs.”¹⁶ Likewise, Thomas Arnold explained in his book *The Spread of Islam* that the Muslims never imposed their religion on people. In fact, the Orientalist scholar Duzi believed that the tolerance shown by the Muslims contributed to the increase in converts to Islam. He writes:

The tolerance and dealings of the Muslims with the *dhimmis* [protected or covenanted people] led to them embracing Islam because they saw in it ease and simplicity that was alien to their previous religions.¹⁷

Throughout Islam’s long history, Muslims never harassed Christians and Jews, nor did they force them to convert. Thomas Arnold writes, “We have not heard of any organised attempt to force the non-Muslims to convert or any organised repression intended to exterminate Christianity.”¹⁸

The Muslims did not attempt to exploit the poverty of the non-Muslims in order to force them to accept Islam, and there are examples that highlight this. During Abu Bakr’s caliphate, Khâlid ibn al-Waleed wrote in his treaty of peace with the Christian people of Ḥirah:

¹⁵ Abu Atlah, *al-Islâm wal- ‘Alâqât ad-Dawliyah*, 45.

¹⁶ Le Bon, *Hadhârah al- ‘Arab*, 720.

¹⁷ Sultân, *Târeekh Ahl adh-Dhimma*, 70.

¹⁸ Arnold, *ad-Da ‘wah ilâ al-Islâm*, 99.

Any old person who is unable to work or disabled, or who was previously rich but then lost his money and is now receiving charity from his co-religionists, will have his *jizyah* [a tax levied on the People of the Book when they are under the protection of a Muslim government] waived. He and his family will be given financial support from the treasury of the Muslims.¹⁹

During his Caliphate, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb once passed by a beggar begging at a door.

He was crying out: Old blind man.

‘Umar poked his arm and asked: To which People of the Book do you belong?

The man replied: I am a Jew.

He queried: What forced you to what I see (begging)?

He responded: *Jizyah*, need and old age.

‘Umar took his hand and led him to his house. Then he sent for the person responsible for the treasury and told him: Look out for him and others like him. By Allah, we have not been just to him if we ate away his youth and then we degrade him in his old age. Allah mentions:

﴿ إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ ... ﴾ (سورة التوبة: ٦٠)

﴿*Zakâh* [obligatory charity] expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy...﴾ (Qur'an 9: 60)

The poor are the Muslims, and this man is from the needy: the People of the Book.²⁰

This continued to happen throughout the rule of the caliphs until the Caliphate of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-Azeez, who wrote to ‘Adiyy ibn Arṭâh:

¹⁹ al Luhaidan, “Samâhat al-Islâm,” 22.

²⁰ al Luhaidan, “Samâhat al-Islâm,” 23.

Take care of those dhimmis who have become old and whose capacity is diminished and who are unable to earn. Give them what is appropriate for them from the treasury of the Muslims.²¹

²¹ al Luhaidan, “Samâḥat al-Islâm,” 26.

The Call to Dialogue

Islam has made clear that one of the characteristics of human beings is that they have diverse cultural backgrounds.

﴿وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۚ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ ﴿١١٨﴾ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ ۚ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ... ﴿١١٩﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ١١٨-١١٩)

﴿And if your Lord had willed, He could have made humankind one community; but they will not cease to differ except whom your Lord has given mercy, and for that He created them...﴾ (Qur'an 11: 118-119)

Being different should not lead to people killing each other, and killing someone on the basis of not adhering to the faith of Islam is not justified. Different colours, races and languages exist so that people may know each other and exchange ideas and expertise developed by different modes of living.

﴿...وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا... ﴿١٣﴾﴾ (سورة الحجرات: ١٣)

﴿...and made you nations and tribes that you may come to know one another...﴾ (Qur'an 49: 13)

The Qur'an urges believers to engage in dialogue with others. Muslim culture is enriched by coming into contact with other nations, exchanging ideas, and adopting what is good. Many nations accepted Islam and held on to their existing customs and traditions, because although these customs did not resemble the customs of other Muslim nations, they did not violate Islamic principles either. Islam is tolerant, welcoming in nature and inclusive of all.²²

²² Turkistâni, "Al-Ḥiwâr ma'a Aş-ḥâb al-Adyân," 11-12.

﴿وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ...﴾ (٤٦)

(سورة العنكبوت: ٤٦)

«And do not argue with the People of the Book except in a way that is best...» (Qur'an 29: 46)

Arguing in the best way is synonymous with positive and constructive dialogue. Examples of dialogue have been mentioned in the Qur'an, as in this verse addressed to the Prophet (ﷺ):

﴿قُلْ يَتَاَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَّامٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ٦٤)

«Say: O People of the Book, come to a word that is equitable between us and you — that we will not worship [any deity] except Allah, will not associate anything with Him and will not take one another as lords instead of Allah. But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him].» (Qur'an 3: 64)

Dialogue adds to the depth of every culture. By continuous peaceful contact, humans learn to become less prejudiced and more inclined towards peace, and thus more tolerant. Incorrect notions about others are also shown to be wrong. The social anthropologist Scott Beck described the benefits of dialogue as follows:

The main message for human dialogue and communication results, or should result, in arriving at a mutual truce... communication and dialogue can eventually lead to breaking down barriers and walls that cause misunderstanding and leave humans disconnected from each other.²³

Dialogue does not have to result in unanimous consensus. One purpose of dialogue is to clarify facts and reduce the bigotry that

²³ Turkistâni, "Al-Ḥiwâr ma'a Aş-hâb al-Adyân," 14.

springs from misunderstanding and incorrect information; another purpose is to find new ways to coexist despite differences. Even if the dialogue results in each party sticking to its stance, fighting is not permissible.

﴿قُلْ لَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا أَجْرَمْنَا وَلَا تُنْتَلٰ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾ قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبُّنَا ثُمَّ يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٢٦﴾﴾
(سورة سبأ: ٢٥-٢٦)

﴿Say: You will not be asked about what we committed, and we will not be asked about what you do. Say: Our Lord will bring us together; then He will judge between us in truth. He is the Knowing Judge.﴾

(Qur'an 34: 25-26)

﴿وَإِنْ جَادَلُوكَ فَقُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾ اللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ ﴿٦٩﴾ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾﴾
(سورة الحج: ٦٨-٦٩)

﴿And if they dispute with you, then say: Allah is most knowing of what you do; Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which you used to differ.﴾

(Qur'an 22: 68-69)

The Muslim Ummah and the wider world are in dire need of these sublime, deep-rooted Islamic concepts at the present time when, instead of cries for unity, cries about the clash of civilizations are on the rise from both Western and Muslim extremists. While some extremists in the West advocate fighting Islam and preventing its spread using all means, including adopting military action, some extremists in the Muslim world call for terrorism and the killing of innocents as a means of retaliating for the injustices that Muslims are suffering in many parts of the world.

Objective dialogue among Muslims, and between Muslims and non-Muslims, will lead the people of the world (including Muslims themselves) to have a correct understanding of the religion of Islam. If global powers demonstrate eagerness and sincerity in regard to engaging in dialogue and solving differences peacefully, Muslims

will be convinced of the possibility and benefit of dialogue. This will lead to isolating extremism, which will in turn lead to the end of two of the major causes of tension in the world today: terrorism and extremism.

The ethical code of Islam requires us to coexist with other faiths, no matter how different they may be from ours. This is because it is inevitable to have differences; the Creator of humankind has foreordained this for wise reasons of which only He is aware.

﴿وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ﴾ (١١٨)

(سورة هود: ١١٨)

﴿And if your Lord had willed, He could have made humankind one community; but they will not cease to differ.﴾ (Qur'an 11: 118)

Allah created human beings having different colours, religions, cultural practices and traditions, and this will continue until the Day of Judgement. One of the short chapters in the Qur'an is devoted to this comprehensive concept:

﴿قُلْ يَتَّخِذُ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١﴾ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٣﴾ وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ ﴿٤﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٥﴾ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ﴾ (٦)

(سورة الكافرون: ١-٦)

﴿Say: O disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship, nor are you worshippers of what I worship. I will not be a worshipper of what you worship, nor will you be worshippers of what I worship. For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.﴾ (Qur'an 109: 1-6)

These differences in religion should not result in individuals killing each other.

﴿...أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾ (سورة يونس: ٩٩)

﴿...Then [O Muhammad,] would you compel the people in order that they become believers?﴾ (Qur'an 10: 99)

Human Cooperation

Cooperation is a general principle in Islam. In the chapter of the Qur'an named *al-Mâ'idah*, Allah directs us:

﴿...وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ...﴾

(سورة المائدة: ٢)

﴿...And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression...﴾ (Qur'an 5: 2)

Likewise, the Prophet (ﷺ) applied the maxim of human cooperation when, upon his arrival in Madinah, he established a treaty with the Jews. This treaty was premised on cooperation in matters of good, ensuring the protection of moral excellence and protection from harm. The treaty, based on mutual assistance to repel any attack on their shared land, was breached by a Jewish tribe. The Prophet (ﷺ) also established treaties to establish cooperation with Arab tribes, both Muslim and polytheist.

Another of the Prophet's moral principles was cooperating with others – whether or not they were Muslims – to assist the weak. At the age of 25, he was present in the house of 'Abdullâh ibn Jud'ân when the people of Makkah signed a covenant pledging to assist the weak. This greatly pleased the Prophet (ﷺ), and after receiving prophethood, he said (as mentioned previously):

«In the house of 'Abdullâh ibn Jud'ân, I witnessed a pact that is better, to me, than the best of camels the Arabs possess. If I were called to it after Islam, I would accept it.» (A sound hadith recorded by al-Bayhaqi)

Islam calls Muslims to a framework of greater human cooperation due to common similarities with the adherents of the People of the Book. All three Abrahamic religions believe in God, the prophets, the noble (divinely-revealed) Books, the angels and the Day of Judgement. The moral commandments are also shared by the faiths: Do not kill, do not steal, do not fornicate, and do not lie. The commandments and prohibitions are indicative of the existence of a moral system that aims to achieve good and resist evil.²⁴

Religions are united in their origins and their messages of belief in truth, justice and good. There are many aspects that unite Muslims with members of other faiths, especially with Christians and Jews. It is possible for them to stand together in the face of materialistic, racist and immoral movements, with the goal of protecting the individual and society from wars, disease and hatred.

﴿نَزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنجِيلَ ﴿٢﴾ مِنْ قَبْلُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَنزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انْتِقَامٍ ﴿٣﴾﴾

(سورة آل عمران: ٣-٤)

«He has sent down upon you [O Muhammad,] the Book in truth, confirming what was before it. He revealed the Torah and the Gospel before, as guidance for the people, and He revealed the Criterion [the Qur'an]. Indeed, those who disbelieve in the verses of Allah will have a severe punishment, and Allah is exalted in Might, the Owner of Retribution.»

(Qur'an 3: 3-4)

The essence of the conflict will disappear when human beings truly feel the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. Likewise, the concept of 'survival of the fittest', which has wreaked havoc on the world, will vanish. This concept spurred the belief that survival can only be ensured by using aggression against others, and this caused the law of the jungle to prevail. After World Wars I and II, the nations of the

²⁴ az-Zuhayli, "Wasatiyat al-Islâm," 28.

world realised the importance of human cooperation. The international community established the United Nations, one of whose key goals was to encourage cooperation as a way to strengthen international peace and security. As members of this international organisation, Muslim countries are active in its mission of establishing cooperation in order to achieve peace, security and coexistence.

The Call to Peace

﴿كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كَرْهٌ لَّكُمْ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢١٦)

﴿Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you...﴾
(*Qur'an* 2: 216)

The Qur'an has described fighting as 'hateful', and this is an impossible basis for relations among nations and individuals. Islam invites us to peace; Allah is the All-Peaceful, paradise is the home of peace, the greeting of Islam is 'peace', and the greeting of Allah and His angels to the people of paradise will be 'peace'.

﴿وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلَامِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ...﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٦١)
﴿And if they incline to peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon Allah...﴾
(*Qur'an* 8: 61)

The normative condition of the Muslim state's relationship with other states is peace, whereas war is the exception.

﴿أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلِمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ﴾ (سورة الحج: ٣٩)
﴿Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. Indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory.﴾
(*Qur'an* 22: 39)

War in Islam must be waged for just reasons and to spread the religion, but it is fought against those who prevent the religion from spreading, not to force anyone to become Muslim.

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢٥٦)

«There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion...»

(Qur'an 2: 256)

War is waged to defend the state and to protect the faith. The norm in Islamic international relations is peace, and jihad was only prescribed to end tyranny and aggression. The worst form of tyranny is preventing the spread of the true message and not allowing people to call to Allah and Islam. Likewise, attacking the Muslims, taking away their rights (including the right to practise their religion), and dispossessing them of their wealth are forms of tyranny.

Today, all of the Muslim countries are signatories to the UN charter, which calls for peace and respect for human rights. Still, there are countries that violate these international charters, such as South Africa in the apartheid era or the Israeli state today. Countries affected by these breaches have the right to end this aggression by adopting all possible means.

Fighting Extremism and Finding the Middle Path

(سورة البقرة: ١٤٣)

﴿وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا...﴾ (١٤٣)

﴿And thus we have made you a just community [or middle nation]...﴾

(*Qur'an 2: 143*)

According to the explanation of this verse by (the medieval scholar) Ibn al-Atheer, every commendable trait is found in between two disliked traits; thus generosity is in between miserliness and wastefulness, and bravery is in between cowardice and recklessness. The Qur'an teaches the middle path between this world and the hereafter, the soul and the body, day and night, fear and hope, thought and action, and good and bad. Islam adopts the middle path regarding life. There are some who have drowned in materialism and others who view life as a force of evil that must be repelled. Islam has recognised the importance of both worlds and made this world the cultivating ground for the next life.

﴿وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ ۖ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَحْسِن ۚ كَمَا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ ۖ وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفُسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ﴾ (٧٧)

(سورة القصص: ٧٧)

﴿But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the hereafter; and [yet] do not forget your share of the world. Do good, as Allah has done good to you, and desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters.﴾ (Qur'an 28: 77)

This middle path is embodied in the balance between the rights of Allah and the rights of the creation, and also between the obligation

to obey God and one's personal capacity, for Allah does not burden any soul beyond its capacity.²⁵

The Islamic economic system also adopts the middle path, by protecting the interests of both the society and the individual. Islam respects the right of individual ownership but has regulated it in order to protect the public interests of society. Thus, Islam has criminalised corruption and monopolies of trade; the Islamic state is ordered to facilitate means of legitimate earning while at the same time preventing illegal means. It has made zakâh compulsory on the rich and has encouraged voluntary charity, establishing a moderate and just system whereby no preference is shown to the poor at the expense of the rich, or vice versa. Rather, everyone has been given their due rights.²⁶

Adopting the middle path achieves a balance and ensures continuity. At an individual level, if there are imbalances in the body, the human being becomes ill; the same occurs when there are imbalances in nature and weather. At a societal level, imbalances among the different classes cause conflicts. At the international level, imbalances cause wars and conflicts.²⁷

The Sharia is moderate in its nature, whether in the scope of worship and the individual's relationship with his or her Lord, or in the scope of the individual's interactions or transactions and dealings with his or her fellow human beings. The Sharia stands in between the two extremes of excessiveness and neglect. In the Qur'an and Sunnah, there is abundant evidence of the importance and role of adopting the middle path, making Islam valid for all times and places.

The Prophet's life is an example for Muslims. When some men announced their intentions to fast continuously, pray throughout the entire night, and not marry, he told them:

²⁵ aş-Şâlih, "Wasatîyat al-Islâm," 17-18.

²⁶ aş-Şâlih, "Wasatîyat al-Islâm," 19.

²⁷ aş-Şâlih, "Wasatîyat al-Islâm," 22.

«As for me, I fast and also eat. I sleep and also pray, and I marry women. Whoever disregards my practice is not from me.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Ibn Hajar states in *Fath al-Bâri*:

Sunnah means way, and *raghbah* [translated above as ‘disregards’] means turning away from and rejecting. What it means is that one who abandons my practice and adopts that of others is not from me – alluding to proponents of monasticism who heretically imposed upon themselves this difficulty, in contravention to the pure monotheistic way of life of the prophets.²⁸

History reveals that nations violated the message of the prophets, either by neglecting it or adding to it instead of following the straight path as the messengers had advised them. The Muslim Ummah has also become a victim of this problem. Throughout our history, up until today, there have been individuals who are extreme in upholding the teachings of the religion, whereas others totally ignore these teachings. Islam has grave warnings for those who commit excess in the religion.

﴿قُلْ يٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَآبِ لَا تَغْلَوْا۟ فِى دِينِكُمْ غَيْرَ ٱلْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا۟ أَهْوَآءَ قَوْمٍ قَدْ ضَلُّوا۟ مِن قَبْلُ وَأَضَلُّوا۟ كَثِيرًا وَضَلُّوا۟ عَن سَوَآءِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ۝﴾

(سورة المائدة: ٧٧)

«Say: O People of the Book, do not exceed limits in your religion beyond the truth, and do not follow the inclinations of a people who had gone astray before and misled many and have strayed from the soundness of the way.» (Qur'an 5: 77)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«May the extremists be destroyed, may the extremists be destroyed, may the extremists be destroyed.» (Muslim)

²⁸ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bâri*.

Imam an-Nawawi said that the extremists are those who exceed the limits in their actions and speech.²⁹ The best people of this Ummah (namely the Prophet's Companions and our pious predecessors) stood resolute in the face of a deviant sect that was very extreme. They were faced with what is known in Islamic history as the phenomenon of the Kharijites: people who were extreme in religion and excessive in reciting Qur'an, praying and fasting. One of their core beliefs was that anyone who committed a major sin was no longer a Muslim and must be killed. This led to disorder amongst the Muslims, as well as rebellions that shook the Muslim nations throughout history. The Companions' firm stance against these individuals sometimes involved dialogue and debate, while at other times it extended to waging war against them. The pious predecessors dealt strongly with this deadly disease and warned gravely of the dangers of this sect, whose members believed in declaring other Muslims apostates and punishing them by death.

For these individuals, the Islamic message has been reduced to courts of interrogation that are established with the aim of declaring others disbelievers, thus legitimising bloodshed and seizure of property. This is in direct contravention to the merciful and moderate nature of Islam, which expounds gentleness and love.

﴿...وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ...﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٥٩)

﴿...And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you...﴾ (Qur'an 3: 159)

They forsake their mission of strengthening ties of friendship and love among themselves and also between Muslims and members of other faiths. These extremist ideas and precepts contributed to the decline of the Muslims. They spread the spirit of rebellion and opened up the doors of calamities affecting the general masses, dem-

²⁹ Abâ al-Khayl, "Min Mathâhir Wasaṭiyat al-Islâm," 24.

onstrating that the wisdom built up over a lifetime can be destroyed by minutes of rashness.³⁰

Educational and da‘wah institutions, universities and Islamic organisations need to cooperate sincerely with governments and international organisations to take steps to prevent extremist thought. It is essential to make both long-term and short-term efforts to offer guidance and to reclaim juristic debates from those who have acted reprehensibly with the intention of sowing discord. This needs to happen if Islam is to be represented accurately by the genuine followers of this pristine and authentic religion. The Islamic middle way should be the basis for building ideological and educational institutions with strong academic programmes that properly prepare Muslims to make internal changes, for this is the prerequisite to achieving reformation.

﴿...إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ...﴾ (سورة الرعد: ١١)
 ﴿...Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves...﴾ (Qur'an 13: 11)

³⁰ Hirâs, "Deen al-Wasatîyah," 25.

Taking into Consideration Situations of Need, Avoiding Difficulty and Acting according to One's Ability

Another aspect of tolerance in Islam is taking into consideration situations of need such as coercion, hunger, poverty and illness. In its excellence, this religion provides concessions for each of these situations, and the human being will not be held accountable for acts that were compelled by such circumstances. For example, a person who is forced to engage in illegal sexual relations will not be punished; neither will one who steals out of hunger.

A French legal scholar remarked that the theory of 'situation of need' in Islamic jurisprudence is more comprehensive than the theory of changing circumstances in international law, the emergency law in French administrative law, or the theory of accidental events in U.S. constitutional law.³¹

Dr. Wahbah az-Zuhayli concluded that there are fourteen situations of need that allow for concessions in legal rulings. These include the need for food or medicine, coercion, forgetfulness, ignorance, extreme difficulty, a general necessity, travel, illness and being naturally deficient. There is a principle in Islamic jurisprudence stating that, "Necessity makes the unlawful lawful." For example, eating carrion (dead and decaying meat) is forbidden, yet one is allowed to eat it in extreme circumstances when not consuming it would result in his or her death.

³¹ az-Zuhayli, "Nadhariyah ad-Daroorah ash-Shar'iyah," 315.

There is another principle stating that difficulty begets ease, and Allah reveals:

(سورة البقرة: ١٨٥) ﴿...يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ...﴾

﴿...Allah intends for you ease...﴾ (Qur'an 2: 185)

«Whenever Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was given a choice between two things, he chose the easier one as long as it did not constitute a sin.» (Bukhari)

The extremists are calling for that which is in opposition to Islam, because they intend to impose hardship on the Ummah and the rest of humankind when Allah intended ease for them.

(سورة النساء: ٢٨) ﴿يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُخَفِّفَ عَنْكُمْ وَخُلِقَ الْإِنْسَانُ ضَعِيفًا﴾

﴿Allah wants to lighten for you [your difficulties], and humankind was created weak.﴾ (Qur'an 4: 28)

Allah sent the Prophet (ﷺ) with pure monotheistic faith that necessitated ease in the obligations of Sharia and that did not impose a burden on people as it had been imposed on earlier nations.

(سورة الأعراف: ١٥٧) ﴿...وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ...﴾

﴿...relieves them of their burden...﴾ (Qur'an 7: 157)

He makes the commandments of the religion easy.³² Due to the weakness of human beings, Allah reduced their religious obligations so that they are only obliged to act according to their ability.

(سورة التغابن: ١٦) ﴿فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ...﴾

﴿So fear Allah as much as you are able...﴾ (Qur'an 64: 16)

Acting according to one's ability involves avoiding those questions upon which the Sharia has remained silent. Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) said that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

³² Abâ al-Khayl, "Min Mathâhir Wasaṭiyat al-Islâm," 1-15.

«Remain silent on those matters which I have remained silent on. Those before you were destroyed due to their questioning and disagreeing with their prophets.» (Bukhari)

In another narration:

«Indeed those who were destroyed before you were the seekers of difficulty (in religion). By Allah, I fear that if I made the entire earth lawful for you and a part of it forbidden, you would fall into the forbidden section... When I command you to do something, then do as much as you can; when I forbid you from something, then leave it.» (A sound hadith recorded by aṭ-Ṭabari)

Al-walâ' wal-barâ' and Tolerance

In Islam, the basis of interaction with other people is tolerance, in the sense of compassion and forgiveness. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: «Indeed Allah loves gentleness in all matters.» (Bukhari)

‘Â’ishah, the Mother of the Believers (*raḍiya Allâhu ‘anhâ* – may Allah be pleased with her), said:

«Whenever Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was given a choice between two things, he chose the easier one as long as it did not constitute a sin. If it was a sin, he would be the furthest of people from it. He never took revenge for himself, but if the honour of Allah was violated, then he would take revenge for the sake of Allah.» (Bukhari)

Tolerance, as alluded to above, does not mean deceitful flattery that merely puts a lid on differences; nor does it mean devising a false stance of unity.

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنزَلْنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَهْدَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّاهُ لِلنَّاسِ فِي الْكِتَابِ ۖ أُولَٰئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّعْنُونَ﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٥٩)

«Indeed, those who conceal what We sent down of clear proofs and guidance, after We made it clear for the people in the Scripture – those are cursed by Allah and cursed by those who curse.» (*Qur’an* 2: 159)

There is a fine line between obligatory tolerance and forbidden flattery. A flatterer is the one with a weak personality, who displays unconditional love to all, whereas a tolerant person is a genuine believer who forgives but does not utter anything that constitutes disbelief or acceptance of acts of disbelief.³³

³³ Ibn Taymiyah, *Majmoo‘at al-Fatâwâ*, 28:615.

This leads to the Islamic concept of *al-walâ' wal-barâ'* (friendship and renunciation, or love and hate for Allah's sake) and how it relates to tolerance. It is important to remember that there is no contradiction between these two concepts, because they emanate from the same source: Allah (ﷻ). There are different levels of *al-walâ' wal-barâ'*:

1. *Al-walâ'* can be understood as a political concept that can be translated as loyalty to the Islamic state and wanting to see the Islamic state victorious and at the forefront of all advances.
2. Complete *al-walâ'*, as in absolute love and cooperation, exists among Muslims only.
3. *Al-barâ'* is rejection of disbelief while wishing the best for every human being. An example of this is the friendship that can exist between a Muslim and a non-combatant disbeliever, on the condition that the Muslim displays love for him or her as a human being and not out of admiration for his or her beliefs or actions of disbelief. A Muslim man is allowed to marry a Christian or Jewish woman, and marriage undoubtedly requires love and compassion between the spouses and also between a non-Muslim mother and her Muslim children. This love does not involve accepting their beliefs, though; those beliefs must be rejected so that the Muslim does not leave the fold of Islam. Shaykh Şâlih al-Fawzân states:

Islam commands opposing the disbelievers in order to prevent parts of their religion from creeping into Islam. This is in accordance with the principle of blocking the means.³⁴

4. Complete *al-barâ'* (renunciation) of those who oppose Islam means that a Muslim must not show affection for any disbeliever who opposes and fights Islam.

﴿لَا يَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ﴾

﴿وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ ...﴾ (سورة المجادلة: ٢٢)

(سورة المجادلة: ٢٢)

³⁴ az-Zayd, *at-Tasâmah fil-Islâm*, 30.

﴿You will not find a people who believe in Allah and the Last Day having affection for those who oppose Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ), even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred...﴾ (Qur'an 58: 22)

These levels may also be looked at in another way:

1. Al-walâ' as a political concept translates into complete love for the Islamic state, hatred for those who are opposed to it, and refraining from undertaking any action that could harm the Islamic state.
2. Al-walâ' and al-barâ' as a religious concept refers to befriending Muslims and rejecting disbelief and disbelievers in a broader sense.
3. Al-walâ' and al-barâ' as a social concept means befriending Muslims and hating the disbelievers who fight Muslims. As for those who do not fight, we hate their beliefs and actions of disbelief, but we wish the best for them as human beings.

On this basis, we can say that the highest level of tolerance can be developed among the Muslims themselves, and its lowest level should be found when dealing with those non-Muslims who fight Islam; we should not oppress them, and we should be just in dealing with them.

﴿...وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوْا...﴾ (سورة المائدة: ٨)

﴿...and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just...﴾ (Qur'an 5: 8)

Tolerance towards non-Muslims who do not fight Islam means being good to them and treating them kindly.

﴿لَا يَنْهٰكُمْ اللّٰهُ عَنِ الَّذِيْنَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوْكُمْ فِي الدِّيْنِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوْكُمْ مِّنْ دِيْنِكُمْ اَنْ تَبْرُوْهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوْا

إِلَيْهِمْ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِيْنَ﴾ (سورة الممتحنة: ٨)

﴿Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes — from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.﴾ (Qur'an 60: 8)

Tolerance in Action during the Era of the Prophet (ﷺ)

Allah described His Messenger (ﷺ) as a mercy for humankind. Mercy is even greater than the highest levels of tolerance, because in addition to forgiveness, mercy requires wishing the best for others. As mentioned earlier, the Prophet (ﷺ) stood up for a funeral procession passing by, and when told that it was the funeral of a Jew, the Messenger of mercy (ﷺ) asked:

«Is it not a soul?» (Bukhari)

Allah has said of the Prophet (ﷺ):

(سورة القلم: ٤)

﴿وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ ۝٤﴾

«And indeed, you [Muhammad] are of a great moral character.»

(*Qur'an* 68:4)

(سورة الأنبياء: ١٠٧)

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ۝١٠٧﴾

«And We have not sent you [O Muhammad,] except as a mercy to the worlds.»

(*Qur'an* 21: 107)

Imam Muslim reported from Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) that:

«It was said: O Messenger of Allah, curse the polytheists.

The Prophet (ﷺ) replied: I was not sent to curse; I was sent as a mercy.» (An acceptable hadith recorded by al-Bayhaqi)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) also said:

«Verily, I am a guided source of mercy.» (Bukhari)

The incident of Taif exemplifies the mercy and tolerance of the Prophet (ﷺ). After being persecuted by the Quraysh of Makkah, he

set off to Taif to invite its people to Islam. The people responded terribly, sending their children and insane people after him to pelt him with stones until his feet were dripping with blood. The Prophet (ﷺ) took refuge in a garden and turned towards the All-Powerful, the most High. There he made his famous supplication, which was immediately answered by the arrival of Angel Gabriel (ﷺ), accompanied by the Angel of the Mountain, who sought permission from the Prophet (ﷺ) to crush all the people in between two nearby mountains. The Messenger of mercy (ﷺ) replied:

«No. Instead I shall supplicate for them.» (Muslim)

The Messenger (ﷺ) said:

«Allah, guide my people, for they know not.

Gabriel said: Truthful was He who named you the most kind and merciful.» (An acceptable hadith recorded by al-Bayhaqi)

This degree of tolerance reveals first and foremost the mercy of the Prophet (ﷺ), and then his foresight, because he said:

«I hope that from these people will emerge those through whom Allah will glorify the religion.» (Bukhari)

This is precisely what occurred later when Allah elevated Islam in the eastern and western parts of the earth through the people of Taif (and others of the Arabian Peninsula).

The Messenger (ﷺ) was also tolerant with the polytheist captives. He commanded his Companions to treat them kindly, to the extent that the Companions would give the captives preference over themselves when feeding them and giving them a place to rest.

Abul-‘Âṣ ibn ar-Rabee‘, the husband of the Prophet’s eldest daughter Zaynab (رضي الله عنها), was captured in the Battle of Badr. Although Zaynab had embraced Islam, her husband had not. Abul-‘Âṣ was released by the Prophet (ﷺ) after agreeing to let Zaynab leave him and migrate to Madinah. Upon his return to Makkah, he prepared provisions for the journey and let Zaynab go with his brother Kinânah ibn ar-Rabee‘.

The Quraysh became angry when they heard about this, and a group of them, under the leadership of Hubâr ibn Aswad, set off in pursuit. When they caught up with Zaynab, they terrorized her. Hubâr flung an arrow at her while she was in her camel litter. She was pregnant at the time, and this incident led her to miscarry and caused her great distress.

When the news of this reached the Prophet (ﷺ), he was furious and sent men in pursuit of Hubâr to avenge the attack on his daughter, but Hubâr disappeared without a trace. Sometime later, the Prophet (ﷺ) was sitting with his Companions when a man approached them with his face veiled. Hubâr lifted his veil and gave his arrow to the Prophet (ﷺ) so that he could do with him whatever he willed. In a sign of the Prophet's tolerance, and of his mercy overpowering his justice, he forgave Hubâr, who subsequently entered the fold of Islam.

After Allah gave victory to the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions in the peaceful conquest of Makkah, the people of Makkah gathered around the Prophet (ﷺ) to see how he would deal with them. There was not a single person among them who had not done some injustice against the Muslims — tortured and oppressed the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions; plotted to kill him the night he was forced to leave Makkah (the most beloved place on earth to him) to migrate to Madinah; or fought him in the battles of Badr, Uhud and the Trench. Now their fate lay completely in his hands. According to his biographers, the Prophet (ﷺ) simply looked at them and said, "Go, for you are free."

Due to the remarkable tolerance that he demonstrated, the hearts of the Makkan people were won over. All of the people of Quraysh accepted Islam, except for a few whose hearts were filled with hatred, but it was not long before even those who were initially reluctant became Muslims.

The Sunnah is replete with hadiths urging the adoption of tolerance and justice. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Those who are just will have pulpits of light from Allah. They are those who are just – in their rule, with their families, and in everything they are in charge of.» (Muslim)

‘Amr ibn al-‘Âṣ reported:

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to address the worst of people by facing them in order to win their hearts.» (aṭ-Ṭabarâni)³⁵

The Prophet (ﷺ) especially singled out Christians to be treated with tolerance. The starting point with the Christians is their deep reverence for one of the Messengers of Allah; the Prophet (ﷺ) said: «The prophets are paternal brothers. Their mothers are different, but their religion is one. I am the nearest of all the people to Jesus (ﷺ), the son of Mary.» (Bukhari)

Regarding the protection of non-Muslims living within an Islamic state, the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Whoever kills a person who is granted the pledge of protection by the Muslims shall not smell the fragrance of paradise, even though its fragrance can be smelled at a distance of forty years (of travelling).» (Bukhari)

«Whoever wrongs a person who is granted the pledge of protection by the Muslims, or usurps his rights, or takes something from him without his consent, I shall plead for him [the non-Muslim] on the Day of Judgement.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

When a delegation of Abyssinian Christians came to visit the Messenger (ﷺ) in Madinah, he took them into his mosque as guests, honouring them and serving them himself. This was a sign of his grateful loyalty to the Abyssinians who had hosted his Companions at the beginning of his calling to Islam. It was also a lesson about the tolerance that Muslims should show towards those who do not share the same beliefs, as long as they are not at war with the Muslims. The

³⁵ al-Haythami, *Majma‘ az-Zawâ'id*, 15:9.

difference in belief did not prevent the Prophet (ﷺ) from hosting them in the mosque and serving them himself; this was how the Prophet (ﷺ) dealt with people of different faiths.

His tolerance was not restricted to Christians and other Arab opponents but also included Jews who lived in the Islamic state and neither engaged in war against it nor betrayed it. Sa'eed ibn al-Musayyib reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) gave charity to a Jewish household and that this continued after the Prophet's death.³⁶ This shows that the Prophet (ﷺ) would look into and review the needs of the non-Muslim residents of the Muslim state and would fulfil their needs.

At the time the Prophet (ﷺ) passed away, his shield was held by a Jewish man; it was used as collateral for about three litres of barley, from which the Prophet (ﷺ) used to eat and feed his family. He was the supreme leader of the Arabian Peninsula at the time of his demise. He could have taken a loan from one of his wealthy (Muslim) Companions, but he wanted to teach by example. This is an example of the Prophet (ﷺ) teaching his Ummah about tolerance in dealing with non-Muslims and that Islam does not differentiate between a Muslim and others in relation to displaying excellent character.³⁷

When the Prophet (ﷺ) conquered Khaybar after defeating the Jews, the Muslims entered and gathered booty that included a copy of the Torah. The Prophet (ﷺ) ordered that it be returned to them. This was (a symbol of) the religious freedom granted to them.³⁸ Today, when means of communication with non-Muslims have rapidly increased and such communications have become part a Muslim's daily life, we are in even greater need of taking inspiration from the tolerance which the Prophet (ﷺ) commanded.

³⁶ Abu 'Ubayd, *Kitâb al-Amwâl*, 728.

³⁷ Ṭabârah, *Rooḥ ad-Deen al-Islâmi*, 286.

³⁸ az-Zayd, *at-Tasâmah fil-Islâm*, 107.

There was a young Jewish boy who used to serve the Prophet (ﷺ). (One might ask why a Jewish boy was serving him. Were there not Muslim boys who were willing to serve him? Of course there were, but this was Muhammad [ﷺ], the teacher in action.) When this boy was severely ill, the Messenger (ﷺ) went to visit him. He sat by his head and whispered in his ear, advising him to accept Islam. The boy looked at his father, who said, “Obey Abul-Qâsim (a nickname of the Prophet).” The boy became Muslim and the Prophet (ﷺ) left, saying: «All praise is due to Allah, Who saved him from the hellfire.» (Bukhari)

This visit demonstrates the importance of being good neighbours and of kind treatment towards those with whom one has an agreement. This was unquestionably a way of life that was to serve as a model for his Ummah.³⁹

We desperately need to take inspiration from the mercy and tolerance of the Prophet (ﷺ), so as to lighten the dark paths of our lives and remove the anger from our hearts. We need to follow in the footsteps of our role model to be tolerant amongst ourselves first, and then to extend this tolerance to those with whom we disagree.

³⁹ az-Zayd, *at-Tasâmah fil-Islâm*, 106.

Tolerance in Islam and the 'Clash of Civilizations'

In the 7th century CE, Islam had a great impact on the Arabian Peninsula. The entire region was transformed from a state of ignorance, backwardness, tribalism and idol worship to the worship of One God, thus putting an end to the differences among people. Islam outlines the scope of all human concepts in two key areas: the relationship of the individual with his or her Creator, and the relationships of individuals and societies with each other (through legislation related to social, ethical, economic and political spheres, both local and international). The Sharia does not allow for either of these to be ignored, and this is what we see clearly in the lives of the Messenger (ﷺ), his Companions, and the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, all of whom stressed the importance of these areas. Muslims are Muslims in all matters, from their individual behaviour to their interaction with their surroundings and their dealings with power, whether they are the rulers or the subjects.

What is of interest here is the system of governance in Islam. According to Sharia texts, especially those pertaining to this topic, governance in Islam is based on three fundamental pillars: justice, tolerance and mutual consultation.

Justice means giving everything its rightful due in terms of reward and punishment, irrespective of relative merit, colour, race or religion. Tolerance means forgiving and pardoning. Mutual consultation refers to selecting the suitable person for each position and giving all subjects the opportunity to carry out their economic, social or intellectual activities.

The system of Islamic governance shaped the spread of Arab-Islamic civilization. The balance of power changed, mindsets were altered, the tables were turned, and there was no looking back. Tyrants were vanquished in a short span of about thirty years from the time that the Prophet (ﷺ) first received the revelation. This was followed by great achievements and successes in the journey of this civilization, whose eternal inspiration and source lay in the Islamic faith and way of life.

Muslim scholars and intellectuals, and others who rallied under the Muslim state, embraced all the knowledge and discoveries that they came across, including ideas from other nations, irrespective of their religion or race. This was not in contradiction to Islamic Sharia texts because they command the pursuit of knowledge regardless of where it is found.

Of course, this era was not entirely devoid of individuals who were motivated by greed and material pursuits, or who were driven by the search for power, status and influence. However, the correct religious understanding, which was predominant throughout Muslim society amongst scholars as well as laypersons, used to thwart the perverted aspirations of such individuals.

We do not find this tolerant stance towards others in many other faiths or contemporary ideologies. Communism deemed it inevitable that all people would embrace the ideology, and more recently, Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' theory predicted the eventual global triumph of political and economic liberalism. These kinds of predictions encourage ideologues to oppress those who do not share their views. They regard them as struggling against the tide of history and doomed to perish; hence they are unconcerned with how dissidents are treated. At times, these ideologues may even eliminate those with dissenting views, in the belief that doing so will help the tide of history.

Samuel Huntington, best known for his 'clash of civilizations' thesis, admitted that the West is now dominant over international

financial and political institutions.⁴⁰ The United Nations Security Council and the International Monetary Fund claim to represent the greater interests of the international community when taking their decisions, but in fact they represent Western interests. Even the expression ‘the international community’ (which has replaced ‘the free world’) has itself become a euphemism that grants legitimacy to all actions carried out in the interests of the West.

After discussing the hegemony of Western civilization, Huntington writes, “The challenge for Western policymakers is to make sure that the West gets stronger and fends off all others, Islam in particular.” He further states:

Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1,300 years... This centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline. It could become more virulent.

He goes on to explain that Islam clashes with other civilizations throughout the world: Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans, Jews in Israel, Hindus in India, Buddhists in Burma and Catholics in the Philippines. He ends by describing Islam’s frontiers as ‘bloody’.

Huntington faced severe criticism for his views, and it seemed that he retreated from them – especially after the United States intervened twice, in 1996 and 1999, to end the Balkan war. However, 9/11 brought a return to the original thesis. At the end of 2001, the Arabic edition of the American news magazine *Newsweek* published an issue revealing how certain elements of the West viewed the Arab and Islamic worlds. The issue was titled ‘After the Evil’ and featured a picture of Osama Bin Laden on its front cover.

Three prominent American thinkers contributed to this issue. Francis Fukuyama, best known for his book *The End of History and the Last Man*, wrote about “The War on Islamic Fundamentalism”. Fareed

⁴⁰ Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” 31-32.

Zakaria, editor of and columnist for the magazine, wrote about "How to Save the Arab World", and Samuel Huntington, famous for his *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, wrote a piece entitled, "The Age of Muslim Wars".

Despite the different titles, all three pieces shared a common theme: they unrelentingly declared war on Islamic fundamentalism, which they described as posing a dire threat to Western civilization and its interests in Arab and Islamic countries. This is a continuation of Huntington's original thesis, in which he argues that:

The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that fuel conflict between Islam and the West.⁴¹

Fukuyama writes:

America's war is not against the terrorists, but against fundamentalist Muslims. They are not a small minority, but, according to estimates made in American academia, form up to 20% of the world's population.

Zakaria writes:

Having destroyed Bin Laden's aura of success, the United States now has a unique opportunity to press its victory and 'drain the swamp' of Islamic extremism. This means taking the battle to its real source, which is not Afghanistan but Arabia.

⁴¹ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 217-218.

The importance of tolerance in tackling the 'clash'

Islam has laid down a ruling for every situation; some of these rulings are applicable to specific conditions but not to others. The richness of this religion allows for selecting the stance that is most appropriate to the particular situation of an individual or a community. This specific characteristic of Islam may be called realism. Many people, including some religious individuals, see this quality as being far removed from Islam. These people believe every command and prohibition to be absolute; they do not take into consideration the time or place, and they remain oblivious to circumstances and potentially harmful consequences. Realism is antithetical to this attitude in that it considers moral goals to be the determining factor for various forms of behaviour. There is a difference between what might be labelled as 'opportunism' and 'realism'.

Islamic realism is beneficial to humanity. According to Shaykh Jaafar Sheikh Idris (a contemporary Sudanese scholar):

Islam is the way of life which was sent down by Allah. It determines peoples' higher goals, assists them with ways to balance their decisions in life, and does not leave the entire matter to their whims and opinions.⁴²

The scholars of Islam have mentioned that the greater purpose of Islam is to promote good and prohibit evil. 'Good' in this case specifically includes spiritual welfare.

For example, in one case, Muslims were commanded to establish prayer only and not to take up arms, even against those who were

⁴² Idris, "Mawqif al-Islâm."

oppressing them. At other times, they were permitted to fight such oppression. In some circumstances, they were allowed to defend themselves, and sometimes they were commanded to fight on request. On one occasion, the Prophet (ﷺ) intended to relinquish some of the Muslims' wealth that had been confiscated by the disbelievers. One may view these as contradictory orders, but a close examination will reveal that applying the same ruling to unlike situations is the real contradiction.

It is true that some people have interpreted the command to fight as the one that abrogates all previous commands, arguing that despite the circumstances, the only option for Muslims is to fight. This is not the soundest opinion, though, because throughout history, Muslims have made peace and signed treaties – even after Islam became complete and the Prophet (ﷺ) passed away. On many occasions, Islamic scholars gave legal rulings that waived some of their rights. This was in accordance with the Islamic policy that states, “The purpose of actions is to achieve the greatest possible benefit and repel the greatest possible amount of harm.”⁴³

In light of the Islamic principles of tolerance, justice and realism, we can suggest ways to help Muslims and the international community get through this and other crises facing humanity.

1. **Inclination to peace.** Some extremists in the West desire confrontation in order to exploit their military supremacy to repress Islam and other civilizations that might pose a danger to them in the future. They instil in their nations the groundless fear that this is inevitable. Inclining to peace will let this opportunity pass, and the Western public will increasingly reject military interventions. It is important that Muslims propose peace initiatives to let the opportunity pass by the extremists, both in the Muslim world and the West.

⁴³ Idris, “Mawqif al-Islâm.”

2. Introducing political reforms in the Muslim world and encouraging greater tolerance, participation and mutual consultation. This will prevent certain elements of the society from being disillusioned to the point of turning against their own countries; it will also create a greater awareness of what the opportunists are up to.
3. Continuing dialogue, in accordance with the example of the Prophet (ﷺ), the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, those who followed in their footsteps from the earlier generations of this Ummah, and all of the intellectuals of humanity. Let us follow in the footsteps of Noor ad-Deen (Nurudin) and Şalâh ad-Deen (Saladin), who gained victory over the racist crusaders through reason, tolerance and mercy, and not merely with the sword.

Conclusion

Tolerance manifests itself in a number of ways in Islam. Islam has elevated the status of human beings in a general sense, irrespective of their religion, colour or race, and this is reflected in their behaviour when they interact with each other.

Islam has adopted the principle that there is no compulsion in religion, and this allows followers of other religions to live peacefully under Islam, secure in their lives and religion. Islam calls us to engage in dialogue in order to solve differences, remove ambiguities, discover new things and seek benefit from the experiences of other nations. This exchange of ideas has enriched the Islamic civilization and allowed it to contribute positively to all human civilizations.

Islam calls for human cooperation, and this is reflected in the actions of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), who cooperated with Jews and non-Muslim Arab tribes to achieve common goals. Even though he was the leader of the entire Arabian Peninsula, at the time the Prophet (ﷺ) passed away, his shield was being held by a Jewish man as collateral. This is an indication for Muslims that their religion calls for cooperation and working together with all people. Islam emphasizes the call to peace and describes fighting as a disliked matter. Islam is the religion of peace and tolerance, not of harshness and brutality.

One of the leading characteristics of Islam is moderation. Islam's emphasis on moderation in all matters means a rejection of material, nationalistic and even spiritual extremism in order to lead a life that is balanced, moderate and free from complications.

The tolerance exemplified by the rulings of Islam is also evident in its consideration of need, removing hardship, and acting according to

one's ability, which allows for the Sharia to be renewed in every time and place. This renewal must be authentic and must spring from the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, for the Prophet (ﷺ) was sent with the message of Islam as a means of mercy for the whole universe.

Despite all this, some Muslim extremists have caused great damage to Islam by adopting terrorism as a means to solve their political problems. On the other hand, there are groups of people in the West who are in favour of these wars and conflicts and who have made the 'War on Terrorism' a war on Islam. Taking inspiration from the principles of tolerance in Islam, the solutions discussed above will assist the Muslims and the rest of the world to come out of this and other predicaments facing humanity today.

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

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Glossary of Islamic Terms*

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---|
| <i>abu</i> (or <i>abi</i>) | أبو، أبي | father (of) |
| <i>Anṣâr</i> | أنصار | ‘helpers’: the Muslim citizens of Madinah who gave refuge to the Prophet (ﷺ) and the other Muslim emigrants from Makkah |
| <i>Dâr al-‘Ahd</i> | دار العهد | countries which have treaties and truces with the Muslim state |
| <i>Dâr al-Ḥarb</i> | دار الحرب | countries that fight Islam and the Muslims |
| <i>Dâr al-Islâm</i> | دار الاسلام | regions governed by the Muslims |
| <i>da‘wah</i> | دعوة | disseminating the teachings of Islam and calling people to accept and embrace Islam |
| <i>dhimmi</i> | ذمي | protected or covenanted people; non-Muslims who must pay the jizyah in lieu of zakât |
| <i>jihad</i> (<i>jihâd</i>) | جهاد | struggle or striving (in Allah’s cause) |

* The Arabic words are transliterated according to the conventions of the Transliteration Chart found in this book. If a word has become part of the English language (that is, is found in a dictionary of Standard English), that spelling is used in this book and appears first in this Glossary, with the transliterated form in brackets after it.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| <i>jizyah</i> | جزية | a tax levied on the people of the Scriptures when they are under the protection of a Muslim government; it is in lieu of the alms tax paid by Muslims |
| Quraysh | قریش | the dominant tribe in Makkah at the time of the Prophet's mission; their society was based on polytheism |
| Sharia (<i>shari'ah</i>) | شرعة | Islamic law derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah |
| Sunnah | سنة | the practice and collected sayings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that together with the Qur'an forms the basis of Islamic law |
| <i>tasâmuḥ</i> | تسامح | tolerance, but with a sense of generosity, forgiveness, ease and smoothness; it does not imply putting up with grudgingly |
| Ummah | أمة | community or nation: <i>usu.</i> used to refer to the entire global community of Muslims |
| <i>al-walâ'</i> <i>wal-barâ'</i> | الولاء والبراء | the concept of friendship and renunciation or 'love and hate for Allah's sake' |
| <i>zakâh</i> | زكاة | obligatory charity: an 'alms tax' on wealth payable by Muslims and to be distributed to other Muslims who qualify as recipients |

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